Murder Crushes

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Murder Crushes

by Hannigrammatic

Summary

Will receives a message from Miss Sterling asking him to meet her at his home. Someone rather familiar is there too.

Notes

ONWARDS to part two! I'm excited for this to get going again. I was going to wait a bit longer and rest my brain, but I have too many ideas and they want out!

All mistakes are mine<3

Love of a Father

Miss Sterling's green eyes were wide with terror as she knelt in the middle of her living room.

Will Graham was a man that prided himself on being able to handle life when it threw him a curveball. He could go elbow-deep in dirty if he had to (and he did, several times), and still come out the other end with a grin. Will Graham was also a man that prided himself on his ability to adapt quickly to any given situation, even those moments when most people are left unsure of what expression to make. He could lock down his inward emotions and move on auto-pilot or beyond a facade that got him through the moment.

Right now, however, he could only stare down at the woman who had minded Abigail for the last four months. Five days out of the week to make it easiest on Will, who worked later than when his daughter's school let out, and who was just finishing up his shift when her piano lessons let out. Five days out of the week that she was entrusted with the safety of Will Graham's precious little girl. Will stood unblinking for what felt like an eternity.

"Hi, Mister Graham?" Miss Sterling's voice on the messaging machine sounded tinny and hoarse. "Can we meet at my place? I just want to explain myself, and I want to apologize in person for what happened with Jorge Corwell."

Intrigued, Will had written down the time she wanted to meet up. He'd had no intention of ever speaking to her again after learning that she'd taken money to abandon his twelve year old daughter in the city. But he was curious, and more importantly, his guts were pulled into knots immediately after he listened to the message. Something about it was off, and it was enough that he called the babysitter from earlier in the week, the one with the penchant for cigarettes. He supposed he'd just have to pick up some air fresheners; if he were honest with himself, his lack of connections in Baltimore didn't exactly leave him with many options, and no one could be perfect. Even if he did want the very best in every situation for Abigail, perfect just didn't exist.

So he gave Abigail a tight hug before leaving, telling her the warehouse needed him, and her nod of understanding broke his heart a little at his need to lie. Head down and his hands buried in the pockets of his brown coat, he was just another person on the street that night, and really, that's all he'd intended to be, until he'd arrived at Miss Sterling's house and found the door opened wide.

Her mouth was gagged with what looked like a tie, black and violet and silk, and her hands were bound behind her back with nylon rope. She'd been crying, as evidenced by the dark tracks smudged down her cheeks, and her wild curly blond hair was matted with something dark. Will finally blinked, and he reached up to push his glasses back up on his nose and to cover his face as he fixed his expression into something less obvious.

"I'm certain you're already aware," a familiar accented voice spoke suddenly. "But Miss Sterling here has been very, very naughty."

Will felt his entire body seize up momentarily, and it wasn't in anger like he'd assumed it would be in the event that he ever heard that voice again. Instead Will found himself barely refraining from turning red with how excited he felt, to be back here, somewhere nondescript, a bound body in front of him, that *voice* in his ears and the smell of rich cologne pervading his nostrils. Will could tell the very moment the air shifted, announcing Hannibal's arrival from behind him.

"She has," Will agreed.

Hannibal came to stand next to him, his right this time and not his left. He was in his plastic outfit again, the glistening layers secured over a dark purple three-piece suit. His silver brown hair was held in place with styling product that gave it a soft glow under the lamplight nearby. His profile was no less elegant than the first time Will had seen it, elegant nose and full lips and high cheekbones, deep-set brown eyes crinkled at the sides in an amiable expression. Will was happy that he was breathing steadily and not turning into the stuttering mess he felt like on the inside, being back in this man's presence.

"Fifty bucks wasn't it, Miss Sterling?" Hannibal directed his gaze to the gagged and bound woman, who shook all the more when he'd strode into the room.

Will watched her terrified form silently. He realized quickly now that it was blood in her hair, oozing out of a cut from where she'd smacked her head hard against the wall, where there was a smudge of skin tissue and a few locks of curled blond hair. He could imagine the scene clearly, picturing Hannibal lying in wait as the woman went about her day, hiding in an unlit corner and walking up behind her soundlessly to smash her head against the stone wall.

"I didn't quite hear you," Hannibal said pleasantly, and he pantomimed being unable to by wiggling the fingers of one hand next to his ear as he tilted his head.

Miss Sterling cried out around the expensive silk of the tie shoved into her mouth, but eventually she nodded her head to indicate agreeance. Will dug his hands into his pockets and inhaled and exhaled, and he could tell the moment he became his murder-self. It wasn't another personality or an identity, rather it was a spot in his mind that he could visit at any time, a place molded from desperation and persistence and the perseverance that made up his need to protect his daughter. His body became dreadfully calm as he stood next to the man, next to -

"Hannibal Lecter," Will said with a smirk. "Nice to finally meet you."

Hannibal side-eyed Will with amusement, lip turning up at the corner, before saying, "I do believe we have met before."

Will snickered and finally turned to face the man who had invaded his thoughts and dreams for the last several days straight. Almost a week now, Will realized. He felt a chill roll up his spine as that momentous night flashed across his brain again in snatches of conversation and eye-contact and minute little expressions that they had shared during the murder of Jorge Corwell. The chill petered off, though, as that night was mixed with recent knowledge that came in the form of a headline that screamed MAN FOUND DEAD.

“Don’t play coy,” Will muttered finally, and he saw Hannibal’s tiny smile drop as the suited man also turned to face Will fully.

Hannibal's gaze flitted over his person, taking in the closed off expression and stance of the younger man. Will wore a long brown coat and his hair was smoothed back as much as it could be, tamed for work from his shift earlier that Friday evening. There was a very palpable air of barely concealed rage, and furthermore, Hannibal could smell the energy rolling off of Will’s body like a wave of heat. New and old, and there was something else there too.

“Whatever do you mean, dear Will?” he asked with a blink as he played coy anyway.

“You teach my daughter piano,” Will grit out.

And he was mad now. Will had read and reread that article so many times he could rehearse it in his head now. The forty-five year old that had assaulted his daughter had been found in one piece (mostly at least), impaled on a metal pipe out in the field on the outskirts of the city. A shorter pipe had been bound between ankles to hold his legs spread wide, and another along his back and shoulders to support his arms opened as if waiting for an embrace. Split from sternum to belly, gravity had pulled his organs out to hang wetly, and his genitals had been removed with a clean cut, the testicles included. As Beverly had so excitedly claimed, they had been shoved into the dead man’s mouth and down his throat partway.

Why Will had clicked onto TattleCrime at work, he would never know, as he had never been one to check his sources at that atrocious site. But burning curiosity had finally fuelled him and he’d read Freddie Lounds’ article with a frown. He had to grudgingly admit that she was much better at telling the world just who the MAN FOUND DEAD had been, and he did have some small amount of respect for her for that. The pictures were incredibly clear, taken likely before the crime scene crew were on site, which was enough to make Will continue to dislike her more than he could ever possibly respect her. She was finicky and her sources were all over the place, but more importantly, someone had obviously tipped her off.

Someone like Hannibal Lecter, who had left the body there in the first place.

“I do indeed,” Hannibal nodded, and his voice pulled Will from his thoughts, the accented tone having been spoken louder than usual. “She’s very talented.”

“She is,” Will agreed hesitantly.

He finally looked away from Hannibal’s forehead and chin and met his gaze unflinchingly. Hannibal’s face was carefully blank now as he appraised the shorter man. Will relaxed his shoulders and did the same, closing as much of himself off to the man, determined this time not to be charmed by coaxing smiles and glittering almost-red eyes. Anger was easy to subdue, but betrayal was not, and that’s what Will had been overcome by when he’d first read the article, and endless nights of tossing and turning in bed had still not made any of it into an iota of sense. Hannibal Lecter was a snake, Will decided. The charmer only *thinks* he controls the snake with his music, but the snake only humors him.

“You’re upset with me,” Hannibal’s face contorted into an expression that wasn’t subtle for once.

His brows pulled close together as his full lips frowned, and it was an expression of consternation, Will realized. It bordered on confusion, and maroon eyes raked up and down Will's body with a flaring of nostrils. For his part, Will blinked and stepped back involuntarily, arms falling away from where they'd been crossed loosely over his chest. The amount of emotion the man before him was displaying was greater than Will had seen yet, and he was unsure what to do or what to feel or what to say. Between them and still kneeling on the floor, Miss Sterling cried out around the tie as she worked to get it out of her mouth.

"You told me you'd take care of Mister Corwell's body," Will said finally, and his voice thankfully didn't hitch. "Instead you put it out in the field for the world to see. It could have come back to me."

Hannibal took a single step forward to counter Will's movement, and his head tilted to the side as his features eased back into their statuesque calm. There was a beat of silence, and then Hannibal moved with his characteristic speed to wrap his hand around Miss Sterling's throat, forcing her to stand and bringing her close until her back was to his chest. Will held his ground, planted his feet wide apart, and palmed the switchblade handle in his back pocket.

"Miss Sterling, why don't you tell Mister Graham about that day outside *Lecter's Legato*," Hannibal said as he laid his face very softly against her curled hair, hand still wrapped around her throat now but loosely, other one coming up to pull the tie out of her mouth. "If you scream, I will snap your neck, by the way."

She didn't scream. She cried out and shook violently in Hannibal's arms, but otherwise she looked at Will beseechingly. Will met her gaze steadily and felt his insides turn to sharp rocks, remembering this woman who had held Abigail's hand, had escorted her from school to her lessons and then to his **home**. This woman had been in his kitchen and his living room, had gotten to know his little girl and had integrated herself into his life like an object that you become use to that is useful but not at the forefront of your mind. Will couldn't figure out why his gut hadn't warned him in time, why she hadn't set off any of his instinctive red flags.

"I was hired to wait for you," Miss Sterling spit out in a fearful tone. "Told to look like I was just stopping to check my phone. To be the welcoming neighborhood gal."

"So you *were* planted," Will felt the cold sensation of trepidation climbing up his spine.

"Yes, I was," she began to cry again, not in earnest, but enough to hear it in her voice. "My employer told me to get close. So I did, and then I left your daughter on the street that day because I'd been told to."

"You have a nice house, you wear nice clothes," Will growled.

And it was true. The house they were in was in the heart of Baltimore, a two-storeyed affair with polished wooden floors and partially paneled walls. One wall of her living room was stone brick, and there was a fireplace that was unlit at the moment sat in front of expensive leather furniture. She'd always been wearing the latest brand when he saw her too, but just as he'd neglected to pick up on the fact that she was planted, so too did he neglect to really *look* at her. Will had assumed that she was a college student with her evenings free or a young

adult who worked a day shift. Someone normal and whose huge smile that showed pearly white teeth was as genuine as her offer to help the stressed-looking Will Graham.

“Jorge Corwell paid you fifty bucks. Fifty bucks, and yet you have all of this?” Will waved a hand in a grand gesture before dropping it back to his side in a fist.

Miss Sterling’s tear-tracked face was pale, and she opened her mouth to speak again, but Hannibal’s fingers had tightened at that moment with enough force that she began to choke. Her arms were still bound behind her back so she couldn’t fight against the powerful grip around her throat, and Will looked into her eyes, the whites of them veined at the lack of oxygen supplied to her brain as time passed. And Will continued to look into her them when her face went purple and when her body began to buck and struggle of its own accord.

“Stop,” Will commanded.

Hannibal stopped immediately, dropped her to the floor where she coughed and sputtered, landing with her cheek pressed against the cool surface and with her arms strained at her back still. Now Will looked into Hannibal’s eyes, locked onto maroon irises and his pupils, which had dilated exponentially as he choked Miss Sterling out. The man’s stoic expression was back in place, but he was breathing out of his nose in small gusts.

“How do you know Miss Sterling?”

Will had not told Hannibal about the woman.

A Gift of Love

Chapter Summary

Hannibal comes clean and Will is enamored all over again.

Chapter Notes

These two dorks will eventually kiss. I SWEAR. AMONG OTHER THINGS. -coughs-

All mistakes are mine~

Hannibal didn't answer right away. Instead he appeared to be gathering his bearings, tilting his face upwards as if begging the gods for patience as he inhaled audibly. Finally he exhaled calmly, a cheshire-cat grin taking over his features.

"As you know, I've met her several times before," he began to say. "Since you were not present."

"No, I know that. I mean, how do you know about her involvement," Will groused. "Don't play games with me, Mister Lecter. Tell me everything, now."

The taller man's eyes narrowed as he looked at Will, who felt his lip curl just a bit. He may be determined to not let himself be charmed by Hannibal Lecter, but there was still no denying that the bond between them still existed, however tenuous it felt. Will nursed his wounded heart but it was rough. He'd been in a few short term relationships before he'd stopped trying to date, instead focusing on raising his daughter and pouring his love and affections into that. But feeling so betrayed had crushed him like no one had in the past, and it didn't matter that he barely knew Hannibal Lecter. He'd known the Hannibal Lecter that murdered with him on Tuesday, or thought he did.

"Abigail told me, Will. After our night together dealing with Mister Corwell," Hannibal said simply. "She mentioned that Miss Sterling had to leave for an emergency, and I merely came to the -correct, as you can see tonight- conclusion. Furth-"

"Don't use her name here," Will interrupted loudly.

He stomped closer until his boot almost touched Miss Sterling's head as she lay sobbing on the floor. Hannibal was unmoved, but his eyes flashed at being interrupted, which had Will feeling petulantly successful. He was not above acting like a child if Hannibal was not above

the same, with his games and his half-truths and his need to draw this out. Will had had enough, and he drew out the switchblade and clicked the sharp edge out resolutely. The other man eyed the weapon held in front of Will with curiosity but made no move to disarm him, in fact he hardly blinked.

“You sent this home with her. In a cute little box that she could have opened,” the younger man’s voice was high with emotion, but Hannibal could not pinpoint a one.

Even after taking in his scent earlier, Hannibal’s refined nose could only ascertain that his new friend was upset - and very much so. The smell was bitter and not at all what Hannibal had expected to be faced with after their short time apart. It had felt like an eternity, of course, from the moment Will’s dark figure had disappeared down the street on Tuesday night, and Hannibal had been pleased at the man’s bouncing walk. The entire night had been one of pleasure, surprise, and intense interest, unlike Hannibal had dealt with in very many years. He had taken care of Jorge Corwell, excited to see Will’s reaction to the gift that he’d left him, imagining as he arranged the pig’s rigor-stiff limbs what his new companion would think were he there right then. Instead he found himself staring down the glittering end of a blade, and though it weren’t pointed at him per se, it very easily could be.

“She is very respectful, and I knew that she wouldn’t,” Hannibal informed Will finally. “I confess I was not certain how to contact you again, and so I went with that. I apologize for making the wrong choice, Will.”

“You could have called? Your secretary has my number, you could have just picked up a phone and called me,” and now Will rolled his eyes to the heavens and dropped his hand to his side, still palming the blade but feeling himself grow more frustrated than angry.

“I don’t believe you would have entertained me for a second, and I’m certain I would have sounded just enough different on the phone to have you doubting.”

Will wondered if Hannibal knew that he was already doubting. Everything was confusing and chaotic and Will couldn’t believe it had been less than a week since he’d stood next to Hannibal with his entire body soaring on a high that had everything to do with the other man and not the kill they had committed. Will doubted Hannibal’s words because he doubted his intentions, had been since reading TattleCrime’s article. Clicking the blade back into its sheath, Will let out a long sigh as he pocketed it.

“I’m not killing her,” Will announced. “You can do it, and you can string her corpse up. But you’re not putting me and my daughter in danger again.”

At his words, Miss Sterling cried loudly and kicked her legs out, hitting at Hannibal’s shins uselessly, as the other man barely moved. He took in Will’s words as if savoring a glass of wine, instead, and for many minutes the two men merely stared at each other in silence, gazes drawn inexorably together once again. The air barely shifted as Hannibal knelt quickly and shoved the silk tie back into the sobbing woman’s mouth, long fingers pushing the soft and damp fabric far back into her throat than was necessary. Getting to his feet again, Hannibal strode around her prostrate form to disappear through a nearby archway, nodding at Will to follow him, who did after casting a single glance at the woman.

“It occurs to me that we have come to a misunderstanding,” Hannibal spoke as he opened and closed cupboards in the kitchen. “I wish to remedy that so that we may continue being friends.”

“Do you, now?” and Will considered hauling himself up onto a counter or sitting at the fancy dinner table, knowing that Hannibal would clean the place as he had before, and remembering the newspaper claiming that Jorge’s house had been spotless and bereft of any DNA.

“I do,” Hannibal claimed. “Ah, here we are.”

He brought over two rounded wine glasses in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other, though he looked at it with distaste curling his upper lip. Will took one of the glasses, humoring the man, and let him fill the bottom of it after popping the bottle open, not saying a word as Hannibal did the same to his own before setting the bottle on the counter. In the other room Miss Sterling could be heard choking around the gag, the soft fabric reaching so far down as to cut off most of her air supply. Will also thought he heard her feet squeaking softly along the hardwood floor as she likely moved herself in desperation.

“Jorge Corwell was a gift,” Hannibal’s accented voice was an even baritone that caused vibrations to move over Will’s body as they stood toe to toe again in the kitchen of another victim.

“A gift,” Will echoed incredulously.

MAN FOUND DEAD, a corpse rucked up on a pole through his anus, arms and legs spread-eagled and his cock and balls inserted into his throat - that was a gift, Will realized. He wondered if he’d misheard, but Hannibal’s bright gaze bore into him as he nodded and held his glass up and waited patiently. A gift was a present, a surprise oftentimes, a thing given willingly and with the intention to please the person receiving it. Will wracked his brain as he tried to ascertain just how Hannibal had done that and thought *gift* afterwards.

“He hurt your daughter, Will. So I made sure the world saw that he was a monster, humiliated in death as he could not begin to humiliate himself in life. The world now knows that he was a monster who deserved his end.”

And like that, it finally clicked. Will felt something deep inside of him snap as tension bled out of his system, as doubt took a back seat to a new, relieving emotion. Not quite happy, but no longer did he feel like his trust had been betrayed or his heart scorned. Will felt ridiculous as he acknowledged his overreaction, could not even chalk it up to him being overprotective of his Abi. No, the hours that had passed since Beverly had tossed the newspaper at him had all been devoted to him sulking like a little child. Ducking his head, Will clinked their glasses together finally and smiled his first real smile of the evening, eyes softening up at Hannibal Lecter as they took a sip of the champagne.

“Gross,” Will coughed out immediately.

Hannibal cleared his throat but handled the awful taste better than Will, who set the wineglass on the nearest surface and ran his hands over his face with a shudder. The bottle had

evidently sat in its dusty cupboard for quite a while, and in addition to that it wasn't a great brand to begin with, probably a joke gift or something similar. Unless Miss Sterling had a penchant for incredibly cheap alcohol, Will felt like no one in the world deserved to have to go through what he just had.

"That was not a pleasant experience indeed," Hannibal coughed into his hand politely before disposing of his glass as well, though in an entirely different manner.

"No need to overreact," Will said with humor as he watched the wine glass soar through the air to smash against a wall.

"Is there really no need? I've got you smiling again."

Swallowing a giggle, Will proceeded to choke just a bit on it instead, face turning slightly red as he hit his chest with a fist. His heart swelled with happiness and affection for the man he had been glaring at just moments before, his own words of 'no need to overreact' echoing in his being as he accepted his fault and summarily brushed it aside. He was far more interested in Hannibal Lecter than he was in dwelling on drama of any kind, after all.

"Will you be quite alright, dear Will?"

"Yeah, I'm just, wow that was shitty," and he was glad that his face was already red from choking on the horrible champagne, because his thoughts had devolved enough to make him blush.

"I apologize," Hannibal said gracefully. "Perhaps we ought to try that again another night. Preferably not at a crime scene."

And he reached a hand forward to tuck some of Will's curly hair behind his ear, the motion so very gentle that Will felt his breath escape him again. The action had brought the taller man closer, and he looked down into Will's eyes with his features softened affectionately, his own glinting intensely as they stood in Miss Sterling's kitchen, the both of them having drowned out the sounds of the woman in question struggling in the other room as she steadily choked to death on a silk tie. Hannibal's tie, Will realized, noticing now for the first time that his collar was undone under the plastic suit, and it looked so untidy compared to the first time he'd seen him that Will found his amusement returned enough to embolden him. So in parallel to Hannibal's tucking his hair behind his ear, Will reached up and mussed a few silver brown strands out of place, grinning as they fell across the man's forehead.

"Are you asking me out on a date, Mister Lecter," Will snickered as he spoke, biting his lip as more laughter tried to get out.

"Hannibal, please," the man insisted, teeth glinting as he mirrored Will's humor. "And yes, I am."

"But not a murder date?" Will giggled.

"Perhaps we ought to do that one now."

Will blinked and exhaled the rest of his laughter out, feeling the heat on his cheeks clearly and knowing Hannibal must realize he was blushing like a schoolgirl. Regardless, Will nodded his head once and then rolled his neck to stretch the rest of the tension out of it after he'd dropped his hand back to his side. He wanted to run his fingers over Hannibal's face, feel the angles of his high cheekbones, brush his thumb over pale brows. Will wanted to do a lot of things in that moment, but he fought it back and left the kitchen, nodding at Hannibal to follow. They both walked back into the living room together, shoulder to shoulder, and found Miss Sterling had squirmed her way across the floor quite a bit, having made it to the archway that lead to the front entrance.

"To our first murder date," Will bowed his upper body dramatically again, mimicking the action he'd done at their meeting, and this time he laughed afterwards as his words sunk in.

"And to many more," Hannibal said, but in juxtaposition, he was absolutely serious.

Will shook his head but beamed up at him, hopelessly enamored already. It didn't matter whether or not this was all in jest, it didn't matter that he was about to kill a second person with Hannibal Lecter, piano instructor and serial killer extraordinaire. Nothing mattered but the spark of energy connecting them in that moment, having toasted to their first and certainly not last murder date. Will had already felt the beginnings of an honest to god crush developing on the man after their first kill together, had perused the thought endlessly and smiled as a result too many times to count. He remembered the fog of happiness as he walked home under the stars, and he grasped that feeling again now as he looked up at Hannibal to find him staring down at him intently.

"To many more," Will agreed.

And he drew out his switchblade again and clicked it with finality, looking into the gleaming steel as his eyes narrowed now on the trembling form of his daughter's former caretaker, Miss Sterling.

Love Bares Its Teeth

Chapter Summary

“Did she deserve that?” he wondered out loud.

“You know she did,” and the voice was a whisper now, spoken at his ear with a gentle stirring of breath.

Will and Hannibal on their first murder date.

Chapter Notes

Will is hopeless. I'm hopeless. -FLAILS-

All mistakes are mine~

Miss Sterling heaved uselessly for breath around the tie that was jammed down her throat, and Will could barely believe that this was the same woman who had been alone with his Abigail daily five out of seven days in the week.

It had been a warm day, the sun ushering in the last few days of spring. They’d just moved to the city a few months ago but between settling in and adjusting to new routines and schedules, and for Will a new job at the library, there hadn’t been much time to do much else other than sleep, eat dinner, watch some cartoons together, and then sleep more. Abigail appeared to have no difficulties in school so far, nor any complaints other than a mundane one here or there, but she did express interest in taking up a hobby.

“I want to play the piano,” she announced over dinner after politely pushing her empty plate away from her.

“Sounds tough,” Will teased. “Sure you’ve got the hand-eye coordination?”

“More than you,” she tossed her hair and giggled at him.

“Probably,” and Will took a drink of his soda to wash down the artificial flavoring of his mac and cheese before pausing to consider. “Aright, we can take a look around tomorrow if you want. Find a nice place.”

***Lecter’s Legato** had been the first place they happened upon, situated on a relatively busy street. He wasn’t fond of the bar across the road, but it was far enough down that if it came to*

it, Abigail would be fine taking lessons here. The bell over the door chimed when they walked in, and Will spoke with the secretary as Abigail stood beside him smiling brightly, occasionally preening under Will's attention when he mentioned that she was a very quick learner. Will declined the first time once he had a look at the prices, and they walked out of the music shop/school with a mutual mope, Will because he felt awful for not having much money, and Abigail because she knew her father was embarrassed and upset -also she'd liked the secretary a whole lot, too. But she kept quiet.

The next few hours turned up nothing adequate, as there just wasn't much going for this part of the city, and Will doubted his daughter would want to take a cab or a bus outside of their radius, especially after a long day at school. He bid her goodnight later on that evening and then for three hours straight he worked on his budget, a steady headache forming at his temples as he looked at all of the numbers. But the next day they returned to ***Lecter's Legato*** *and Will successfully signed his daughter up to tutor under the owner and teacher, Mister Lecter. There had been a first name, but Will quickly forgot it, too busy trying to figure out their schedules now. When he walked outside with Abigail in tow, he felt a lot better about himself, so none of that really mattered to him in that moment other than his little girl's huge grin as he perused the brochure they'd been given.*

"Oh, shoot," a distraught voice interrupted them after the door had barely clicked shut. "Wow, my phone just died in the middle of an important conversation. Would you happen to have a cell phone I could use for a second?"

The woman was younger than Will, and she stood at an average height and weight with long and curly blond hair. She had a pretty face and she wore a black leather coat over something glittery and feminine that peeked out at the collar and under the hem, as well as a knee-length dark pencil skirt that matched her high brown heeled boots. Bright white teeth showed in a huge smile that she directed up at him despite her apparent dilemma, and she waved his apology off when he told her that he didn't own a cell phone.

"It's okay, it's not life or death or anything," she said with a tinkling giggle, large and flashy earrings jangling at her ears. "Just a stubborn dad too fond of not taking his meds."

"My dad is stubborn too," Abigail announced from behind the brochure, captivated by the pretty woman in the street.

"Is he now? And who are you, little miss?" the kind woman knelt until she was at Abigail's level.

"I'm Abigail, my dad's name is Will, who are you?" Will wisely kept silent as his daughter took the reins of the conversation, not sensing anything out of the ordinary here, and despite his penchant of being as little sociable as possible, it wasn't something he wanted to pass on to her.

"I'm Miss Sterling," the woman shook Abigail's hand like she was an adult as well, and Will ducked his head to hide his smile at how proud his daughter looked. "Miss is short for Missy. Weird name, huh?"

"A little," the twelve-year old admitted with a laugh that Miss Sterling mirrored.

When the woman stood it was to shake Will's hand firmly, bright green eyes staring up at him, and honestly, after seeing the way she was around his daughter, he was easier to relax around her than he normally was with anyone. Which was of course exactly what Miss Sterling had been going for, knowing that the scruffy and awkward man in front of her did everything for his precious little brat. Inwardly, the blond woman was baring her teeth in a laughing snarl as they exchanged numbers over coffee, and when they parted ways, Will assuring her that he'd call her tomorrow, Miss Sterling rolled her eyes at how easy it had been to slip into the tiny family's life.

Will was entirely clueless. He didn't want to look the gift horse in the mouth.

The woman wasn't pretty anymore. Her face was red with vessels bursting under the strain of being able to draw in hardly any breath, and the crimson matting her hair to her head was drying and crusty and brown. Will grabbed at the back of her shirt and dragged her further into the living room, dashing out all of her progress towards freedom in seconds compared to the lifetime of her inching across her floor as the two men laughed in the kitchen. She ended up on her back with her arms crushed under her as she heaved in and out through her nose, panic taking root deep inside of her and preventing her from pacing herself at all. *They always break the same*, Will thought with a grimace. He stood above her with the switchblade brandished, searching her face for any sign of the charming and nice woman he'd met outside Hannibal Lecter's place of business.

"Even the most powerful men in the world can be deceived by a pretty face," Hannibal said from behind him. "It's an unfortunate quality that some women use to their advantage. It's simple to fake a genuine countenance with a well-placed smile."

"She went right for my daughter," Will growled. "I'm okay with admitting I fucked up royally, but she knew just where to strike, and my throat might as well have been bared for it."

"She was instructed to go right for the soft pink part of you," Hannibal countered. "You could not have possibly known any different."

"Yes, but I *should* have."

Scraping a tired hand through his perpetually messy hair, Will sheathed and pocketed the switchblade again. He knelt before Miss Sterling and firmly pulled the tie out of her mouth and tossed it aside as she heaved in great lungfuls of air gratefully. Her expression was one of hopeful confusion as she looked up at the two men above her, taking in Will's tired frown with a sense of victory. She knew she could probably wile her way into surviving if it were just the father there tonight. She'd had him twisted around her pinky finger the second they'd sat down to coffee and he coughed into his hand with a fucking blush. The other man, though. Miss Sterling knew she had looked into the devil's maw when she'd first seen him, coming into focus kneeling on her floor after he'd attacked her. One look into those eyes had been enough for her to see that he was a dead thing on the inside.

"Abigail is good little girl," Miss Sterling gasped out once she felt she was able to talk. "I was just doing my job, Will."

"*Don't* you ever say her name again," the man shouted.

His entire being seemed to change in that moment. What was once tired acceptance was now righteous anger, blue gaze flashing and growing black as his pupil's dilated. Miss Sterling had one second to realize she'd fucked up more than Will ever had that day outside *Lecter's Legato*. By then it was far too late, though, as she was thrown back onto her front unceremoniously and an unyielding hand lifted her by the hair until she was kneeling in front of him. A guttural gasp left her red lips just before the tie returned, not to gag her this time, no, but to wrap around her neck while Will held the other ends behind her. With a jerk, he began to steadily crush her windpipe. His vision was red again, every vein alive with adrenaline as his rage took over. What had fueled him that night with Jorge Corwell, when he'd sunk his knife into his carotid artery, now fuelled Will Graham as he gripped the ends of the tie with all of this strength, the impossibly soft fabric wrapped around his fists a few times so it didn't slip. Tighter and tighter it cinched into her delicate neck, and with one single harsh snap of his upper body, he felt her body fall limp.

Long moments passed as he stood there, arms in the air on either side of his body and the back of Miss Sterling's head lolling against his midriff. He had felt the second she ceased to exist, and it had been like a light being snuffed out, a candle extinguished by a cold winter wind. It felt like years had passed as the blood rushing through his ears finally faded to a dull thumping, no longer like ocean waves crashing around the inside of his skull. He let out a gust of breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. And then he dropped Miss Sterling's body and promptly took a step back to let it fall onto her fancy wood floor. The room was silent as the tie fluttered out of his grasp.

"I might have overreacted," Will muttered, and he looked over his shoulder until Hannibal was in his periphery.

"I beg to differ," the man moved closer and set a large, warm hand on Will's shoulder, plastic glove having been removed.

It was a tentative action, fingers almost hovering over the jacket the motion was so careful. Will stared ahead as he came back to himself, back from the angry thing he became when he killed. He felt the pressure of Hannibal's gesture as much more than it actually was, his entire shoulder bursting aflame from the sensation of being touched. Without giving it any thought either which way, Will lifted his own hand and set it on top of Hannibal's, stroked his thumb along skin he didn't figure would feel so creamy smooth.

"Did she deserve that?" he wondered out loud.

"You know she did," and the voice was a whisper now, spoken at his ear with a gentle stirring of breath.

Will closed his eyes and felt his body come to life beneath the chaste contact of their hands stroking together comfortingly. His cheeks turned red as he finally caught up to himself, standing over a fresh corpse with Hannibal Lecter, who stood so close behind him now that Will could feel the shadow of his body like a concrete presence along every limb. The house was silent as if in respect for the moment, and it felt like the entire world was holding its breath just like Will was.

“She shouldn’t have said her name,” Will finally said breathily, chest emptying after drawing painfully tight.

He let his hand drop as he turned around to look up at the other man, to look into his heavy-lidded eyes. This man, Hannibal Lecter, had come into his life so quickly and unexpectedly that it was as if someone had merely plopped him down next to Will one day as if he belonged there. And it really did feel like he belonged here, in this room, in his life, in his future. Even with the voice in his head that still screamed danger every time he looked into those maroon-brown depths, Will Graham felt for certain that Hannibal belonged in his life, for better or for worse. The need to protect his Abigail from all dangerous men -and women- dueled with the sensation that seized his heart every time Hannibal looked at him let alone touched him. Small, fleeting things, comfort given freely.

“You’ve done very well tonight, dear Will,” Hannibal said, cultured accent turning the words almost alien with an emotion Will couldn't place, but it was no less reverent.

They didn’t break eye-contact for several moments, and when they did it was because Will couldn’t peer into those endless depths any longer without becoming hopelessly lost. His shoulder tingled with the phantom weight of Hannibal’s hand as if it hadn’t left him for a second. Their first murder date was coming to a close, and Will was so high on endorphins that his smile turned giddy.

Hannibal Lecter gentled his expression in response and felt his entire body thrum with success.

Love Is Power

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will have a bit of conflict during their first murder date.

Chapter Notes

We get a little look into how Hannibal feels here~

All mistakes are mine!

Hannibal kept his eyes on Will as he slipped his glove back on, head tilted slightly to the side. He knew better than to chase eye-contact with the younger man, and it afforded him a chance to study his features in earnest. His usual scruff was well-maintained, and his face was pale under the room's lighting, and to Hannibal he looked so young with his wide blue eyes searching the area around them, nose upturned at the tip and cheeks like a cherub. There was no doubting Will Graham's masculinity, but at the same time he retained a boyish way about him. A newly outspoken part of him, one that had broken the bonds of his impressive self-control, wanted to touch and hurt and break such a small thing. Were he innocent, Hannibal imagined that he would have; were he not a prime example of what love was capable of, that love had teeth and wasn't afraid to bite, Hannibal imagined he would douse the flame between them without a second thought.

But oh how he was smitten. And Hannibal would do anything to get what he wanted.

Will turned around just then, interrupting his thoughts, perhaps sensing his scrutiny despite endeavoring not to look back at him. It was simply fascinating that a mere touch had seemingly torn the man asunder. Hannibal could only imagine what a firmer one would result in, or what he would do if he pressed them both flush together and tipped that beautiful face back to slip his tongue passed pink lips. Hannibal wondered what he would do then. Would he fight for dominance or submit, would he hold Hannibal or push him away?

Hannibal wondered.

Will wondered what the man was thinking and, more importantly, what they should do with the body.

He could feel Hannibal's eyes on the back of his head and he felt his cheeks redden at the intensity with which he was regarded just then. There was a compulsion inside of him to

break the moment, say something stupid or startling, but Will strapped it down and instead looked down on the corpse at his feet. In his mind's eye he could see it, WOMAN FOUND DEAD, another article in another newspaper, another day full of strange tension as the city lost another of their own. Another life taken by the secret justice that Will fashioned himself to be and that Hannibal found was absolutely necessary, as he had made entirely obvious. Will wondered if Hannibal would display her, and if he did, how.

Will wondered.

"Do you regret killing her?" Hannibal asked finally, and Will was glad that he broke the silence before it became suffocating.

"No," Will answered honestly. "She knew what she was doing. If Ab- if Jorge hadn't been unsuccessful, Miss Sterling would have been responsible for what would have happened. And I think we both know just what that piece of shit got up to in his disgusting little shack."

"Indeed," and Hannibal paused again, letting the quiet fall over them like a blanket once more.

Hannibal could feel that Will had become introspective, and he wanted so very badly to be able to climb into that brain and observe everything for himself. A childish part of him felt that it was unfair that he couldn't, and that he had to guess what would happen next. With other people, Hannibal could predict and adjust himself for any situation, but with Will… There was only going with the flow, the both of them swept up in a stream together. Would Will reach ever reach for his hand so that they didn't separate?

"We should do this now," Will gestured at the body. "Or do you have plans already?"

"I had hoped we could do it together," Hannibal admitted. "Or has our first murder date come to a close officially?"

And Will looked at Hannibal over his shoulder with bright blue eyes, pulled out of his thoughts finally as his body reacted to the other man's words. It was ridiculous, he knew. All of it. Turning that evening into a date, especially. Most people went to a movie or cuddled by a fireplace, or met at a cafe to gauge each other before getting closer. It was all so strange to Will, as he compared this night with the meager amount of actual dates he had been on. Wincing, Will closed the book on that chapter quickly, remembering vaguely something about his crotch being soaked in scalding hot coffee.

"We can do it together," Will said. "Whatever 'it' is."

"I want you to come to my place."

Will blinked, opened and shut his mouth a few times, and then managed jokingly, "Wow, Mister Lecter. It's only our first date."

Silence reigned. Will had expected a laugh, or at least a snort of amusement. When he didn't get either he turned to face Hannibal again, took a step closer and tried to look into his eyes, but the other man's head was downcast, turning what Will could see of it into shadows.

Concerned, he moved closer, until their shoes touched, and reached up to tilt the other's head back into the light. Swiftly, Hannibal's own hand came up and snared his wrist in a crushing grip.

"Fuck," Will cursed, in pain and in having been well and truly spooked. "Hannibal, what are you-"

"I find myself rather insulted, Will Graham. I do not enjoy finding myself that way at all," was growled. "I am beginning to think that you are not taking this seriously."

"Wha- Hannibal, I'm plenty serious. Like, I just-killed-her serious," and Will blinked as he finally managed to look into flashing brown eyes, pupils contracted to slits.

"I am not speaking of the death of Miss Sterling, my dear Will. Nor am I speaking of what we will do with her body. No, I am speaking of us."

A hush fell over them both as they stood there, frozen in position, one beseeching and one denying. Will wanted Hannibal's face to soften back into his barely-there smile, not this blank slate, this pulling together of his exoctic features that left him resembling a sculpture too well. With a need he hadn't encountered in quite a while, Will found himself fighting the grip around his wrist so that he could continue to reach out and run his hands over eyes and nose and mouth, so that he could mold the familiar face back into something less unnerving. But Hannibal's grip was unbearably strong.

"What about us?" the younger man asked as he gave in to the concrete wall blocking him off.

"Do you think what we have between us is funny, Will? Is this all just a game to you?"

"Murder is never a game. It's a necessity, remember? I'm n-"

"Will."

And the grip loosened, but only just. Instead of merely trapping him in place, Hannibal adjusted the angle and pulled on the younger man's arm, and Will found his balance thrown quickly, but he didn't fall. He was embraced against an impossibly hard chest, could feel how warm Hannibal's body ran even beneath the plastic and the fancy suit and the shirt underneath it with the undone collar. Powerful arms came to rest without hesitation around Will's smaller body, wrapping over his shoulders easily.

"Us," was whispered from above, and Hannibal's breath danced along the curled hairs of his forehead.

"Us," Will echoed against the plastic.

Tentatively, he wrapped his own arms around Hannibal, embracing the bigger man around the middle and interlocking his hands at the small of his back. They existed against each other like it was meant to be, written and inked on paper, a photograph of a couple too long apart and finally together. Or two pieces of the same puzzle shaken and separated but finally clicked back together after time and effort. Will felt everything inside of him turn to dust, all

of his internal voices shutting down. Simultaneously, he felt himself coming alive with gusto, a storm stirring in the water around him and Hannibal battening him down safely. There was an inward curse at all of the layers separating them, but Will shut that away too, opting instead to just hold his new friend close.

“I’m serious,” Will mumbled. “Especially about us.”

A pleased rumble sounded from Hannibal, and Will couldn’t help but smirk against the plastic-clad chest. He felt the other man’s grip loosen around his shoulders until they fell away entirely, and even if he were loathe to end the decidedly abrupt closeness, Will mimicked the movement and took a step back. He found familiar angles and shadows shifted to highlight instead of hide, met chocolate-soft eyes with his own.

They were both full of the other’s space, not quite satisfied with the contact that had passed between them, but the night was yet edging on and there were things to be done. They kept their silence as Hannibal retrieved his satchel, drawing the body bag out with a flourish and letting Will help him lift the corpse onto it. He watched the younger man kneel to zip it up and he closed his eyes as he remembered the scent of him, tiny and flush and pliant. How easily he could have lifted him and swept them both off into decadence. But there would be time enough for that, he knew, so instead he began the arduous task of cleaning up the house, starting with the stone wall and the dried gore there. Unlike Jorge’s house, where he’d simply trashed it and wiped any surface Will had touched (Hannibal did indeed have protection, and his suit resulted in minimal cleanup required after himself), Miss Sterling’s house was prime real estate, a place that would garner more attention from the public and the forensics team alike.

By the time they were finished it was half past midnight. Will didn’t have work in the morning, as it was going on Saturday and he had the weekends off. He followed behind Hannibal as the man effortlessly carried the body out back and tucked it into the trunk of a black car that thankfully wasn’t flashy. With a laugh he hid behind a cough, Will found he wouldn’t have been surprised if Hannibal’s car had been an obnoxious red Ferrari. He sat in the passenger seat after Hannibal opened the door for him with an exaggerated bow that had him losing his shit for a good ten minutes straight.

❀

The streets were still alive with people, nightlifers pouring in and out of pubs and bars and dance clubs. Will found his chest filling with nervous energy as he realized that they were driving through the heart of the city with a corpse tucked into the back of the car, but quickly the nervousness turned into mischievousness as he realized that they were going to get away with it fine. He felt invulnerable next to Hannibal Lecter, who merely looked at him with a secretive lilt of his lips before diverting his attention back onto the streets. They drove for what felt like an eternity to the younger man, who felt his limbs become loose and tired, another night spent with the creature next to him after dispatching of a monster. It had been less of a together thing this time, no shared gore from their respective knives, but where the tie had aided him in crushing her throat, earlier Hannibal’s fingers had done the same. Joint suffocation, Will mused good-naturedly, as they made it onto a street that housed Baltimore’s

richest. Will's body began to tie into knots instantly as he considered the pros and cons of a serial killer living somewhere so dangerous to his lifestyle.

"And you have a freezer full of bodies?" Will joked, interrupting the quiet that had been their companion for the entire ride so far.

"Multiple, actually," Hannibal said. "Don't worry, dear Will. I know what I'm doing."

As he finished speaking, the car rolled to a stop behind a house that was larger than Will had been expecting. He should have figured, considering the state of Hannibal's clothing each time he had seen him, all expensive three-piece suits and smelling of cologne that came from a bottle that likely cost more than Will's rent. But he also realized he knew barely anything about the man sitting next to him, other than that he owned *Lecter's Legato* and that he had been a psychiatrist in his past. Perhaps the latter had been more lucrative than Will had figured, though he had no room to judge, having considered seeing a shrink in the past and very quickly not because wow those prices. Regardless, the house Hannibal lived at was sprawling, and Will craned his head to look at it until they'd passed under the roof of the garage that sat snug at the back.

"Wow," was Will's genius response as the lights flicked on.

The garage alone was bigger than Will and his daughter's apartment. The interior was done in shades of brown, and even the concrete floor looked inviting. It looked like it could house Will's entire neighborhood, and there was only one other car within the space. In comparison, the vehicle they both stepped out of was shabby, and he appraised the Bentley Hannibal probably normally got around in with interest. Will's first car had been a fixer-upper, and while he still did keep his driver's license updated, he didn't own one at all now, which had made moving more expensive, but everything was within walking distance now that he and Abi were settled.

"Come this way."

And he followed Hannibal Lecter into his domain, barely sparing a glance for the body thrown over his powerful shoulder. Will wondered what it would be like to live in a house that had a freezer -no, multiple- full of body parts.

Love Blooms

Chapter Summary

Teasing is a sign of affection.

Chapter Notes

Closing on this part of the series. Part three to come soon~

NOTE: SO IT OCCURS TO ME I COMPLETELY FORGOT TO ADD SOMETHING IMPORTANT. Too overcome with gushy Hannigram apparently. There's a small addition to the end of this chapter :D

It wasn't quite a cellar that Hannibal brought him to. No, in keeping with the lavish style of his not-quite-a-mansion (but definitely close as far as Will was concerned), the man had an entire floor devoted to his grisly lifestyle. Certainly the entrance to it was a trapdoor that was very well concealed, and it did have the creepy factor to match as they descended plain wooden stairs into darkness. When the fluorescent lights switched on, Will blinked into the brightness as he took everything in, noting that plastic sheeting and chains hung from the ceiling in the center of a wide, open room, closing off a small area within the middle. Two more rooms opened off of it, one of them full of what appeared to be gleaming equipment, and the other -

"I was expecting something less, uh," Will clicked his tongue as he looked around, trying to bring the word to his lips, but it danced at the edge of his thoughts. "Extravagant? Not sure how I feel using that word to describe a murder basement."

"You might as well. Though I had thought that perhaps you would be frightened when you saw where I did my work," Hannibal murmured as he gestured for Will to follow him.

"Not so much frightened," Will followed and eyed the freezers they had talked about, having expected basic white industrial ones, not massive gleaming stainless steel ones with double doors.

Hannibal made a small sound of approval as he dropped the body on his shoulder onto a metal table. Will imagined it resembled one from a coroner's office, where autopsies were performed. It was massive and had a tub underneath it that blood could drain into, and the sides were raised around it as to prevent anything from spilling onto the floor. Will was too excited to observe everything like he would normally be compelled to do, partially unable to

decide where to settle his eyes, but mostly having a hard time looking away from Hannibal Lecter. The man moved gracefully, as if he were in a kitchen instead of a creepy basement unzipping a body bag. Hands crossed behind his back, Will Graham found that he could barely refrain from laughing at just how unreal everything was in that moment. When Hannibal paused as he removed Miss Sterling's body from it's dark confines, it was to rake his gaze up and down his companion, one brow raising as if sensing his humor.

"Do you giggle when you're nervous?" the man asked plainly.

"No. I'm just genuinely amused," and this was followed by the aforementioned giggle. "I'm sorry. I'm not laughing at you. It's just this, all of this. Me and you."

"I had thought we made it obvious that me and you were not a joke, Will."

Will ran a hand through his hair and sighed happily, before saying, "We did. I'm just seeing the humor in the situation. Two killers meeting by chance under the moonlight. Just has a funny ring to it, you know?"

"I would prefer to go with romantic and not funny," Hannibal groused, but his lips twitched into a smile as Will laughed again.

"We're in your murder basement about to dismantle a body and turn it into a posthumous message to leave for the living. Doesn't any of that make you laugh?"

"Perhaps I am too ornery. I'm unsure what you see in me, to be courting me so," Hannibal's tone was joking despite his words, but still Will blinked and felt his cheeks fill.

"I thought you were courting me," Will whispered.

"We are courting each other. Unless you would like me to begin leaving gifts outside your house; Will, I can court you with much pleasure and much more effort that I would gladly put forth."

And Will snorted into his hand as he began to laugh again, just a bit. He stepped closer and came to a standstill on the opposite side of the table, and he peered down at the remains of his former caretaker. Ugly bruises had had time to form around the pale column of her throat, and her hair already appeared to be lilting. He knew that the corpse would be soft still, knew that it wouldn't pull stiff with rigor mortis for another few hours, and so now was an opportune time to get their work done. He let himself observe the electric bonesaw that Hannibal retrieved, but then he paused in his observations as he noticed that Hannibal had not looked away from him at all.

"Come here, Will," he said once he'd caught Will's eye, and it was a command more than a request, but the younger man found his body obeying immediately.

Circling the table, he stopped next to Hannibal as the man plugged the bone saw in. Will hesitated for maybe two seconds before he closed his hands around the cool plastic surface when it was handed to him, and for a few minutes there was eerie silence. Then it occurred to the younger man that he still wore his own clothes, casual attire, and one of his best coats, but

before he could maneuver the saw onto the table, let alone begin to unclasp the buttons on the brown garment, Hannibal spoke up sharply.

“Don’t. I can replace it.”

“What? No, it’s fine, Hannibal. Just let me-”

Both of Hannibal’s hands come to rest on his shoulders, and all thoughts of protest fled from his mind. The warm pressure of his fingers massaging just gently towards his collarbones was enough to cause his heart to flutter, and though he knew that Hannibal was holding him in place rather sturdily to dissuade him from removing his coat at all, he still couldn’t say or do anything in that moment other than swallow air that seemed to come just a bit less easily now. He heard the man at his back whisper his name once in near-reprimand, but to Will it felt more like a praise than anything. Devouring it, all of the sensations flooding him, Will went to work without another word, clicking the implement on and gritting his teeth at the squealing mechanical sound that filled the air. As he directed the spinning blade towards its mark, Will realized that Hannibal was putting the reins in his hands just as he’d implied he would the ‘next time’ they murdered together, and it was with a smirk now that he began to saw into pliant flesh and bubbling life’s blood.

❀

What felt like eons had only been two and a half hours, and Will sat in the kitchen at an island counter, blinking owlishly at the room. Wooden cabinets and cupboards, stainless steel countertops and a massive, two-door fridge and freezer combination, Hannibal’s kitchen was as graceful as its owner. One wall was slate grey, which housed the oven and stove next to the fridge, while the others were a creamy off-white color. Behind him sat a comfortable recliner chair near a dark doorway, and there was a painting on the wall Will couldn’t discern in the dim lighting, as well as a smaller steel table and a square wooden one. It was the kitchen of a chef, he realized, and suddenly he looked at Hannibal in a new, curious light, as he discovered something more about him.

“I will drive you home within the hour,” the man in question announced. “But not before you join me for a drink,”

“To make up for the awful crap we toasted with earlier?” Will surmised with a snort.

“Yes, that,” and Hannibal winked at Will (who definitely didn’t grow flustered again) as he set two fat wine glasses down on the counter next to him and uncorked a bottle of wine.

As he poured with one hand, he set the other on the back of Will’s stool, fingers ghosting between the younger man’s shoulder blades. Freshly showered and dressed in Hannibal’s own clothes, Will was sight to behold. He was just small enough that the button-up shirt and the slacks hung on his frame awkwardly, but the garments were warm and soft, and all traces of blood had been melted away under a heavenly jet of water with adjustable pressure. There had been a cursory hose down in the cellar first, of course, and a very awkward time when Hannibal told him casually to strip of his clothes to step into a robe that hung nearby, but as usual, the man was respectful, and he strode out of the room as Will hastened to get it over with. Still reeling from the gorgeous bathroom with its corner-set tub and the walk-in glass

shower, Will was wholly taken with how extravagant Hannibal Lecter's life in Baltimore really was.

Now, cozy and clean, he wrapped his fingers around the stem of the wine glass delicately, not bothering to peruse the bottle as it wasn't in english, and held it up to meet Hannibal's toast, finding he was too shy in that moment to meet his eyes. There was something entirely personal about sitting in his kitchen, let alone wearing the man's clothes, and Will knew he'd feel just as tentative and shy were he not.

"Dear Will," Hannibal's accent grew thick at his completely affectionate tone, and Will looked up finally, nostrils flaring as his heart kicked into overdrive. "There you are."

"Hi," Will said uncertainly. "Sorry, I guess I got distracted. You have a beautiful home, Hannibal."

"Thank you," Hannibal's smile stretched and showed a few uneven teeth, and Will's stomach filled with reciprocated emotion. "To our first murder date."

"And to many more," Will agreed as he adjusted the stool to face Hannibal better.

The gentle tink of their glasses was the only sound in the room, and to Will it felt like it echoed throughout the entire house. His heart was in his throat, making his first swallow of rich wine a little more difficult, but thankfully he didn't cough or splutter. His thoughts were full of the man who still leaned against the back of the stool, whose eyes were a tangible weight as they flicked away from Will's blue ones. If he weren't already blushing, Will would be now as he realized that Hannibal was watching him lick his lips of the sweet wine. His heart skipped a beat.

"To many more, indeed," Hannibal said, and then he wordlessly took Will's glass from his hand and set it onto the countertop with his own.

With barely time to blink, Will found his face cradled between two large hands, the long fingers buried into his curly hair and stroking along his scalp pleasantly. Maroon eyes were dark, looked black with pupils blown wide, and Will felt his vision tunnel, narrowing in on the familiar face above him as Hannibal remained standing while he sat on the comfortable stool. His breath left him in a gust when it became too painful to hold inside, stirring the collar of Hannibal's fresh shirt and causing some of the hair that had fallen into his eyes to dance in the air minutely. Will felt as if he were a boat at sea just then, finally come home after a raging storm, and he didn't blink as Hannibal moved closer, didn't close his eyes despite feeling compelled to, didn't so much as move a muscle as the man brought their face so close together their lips brushed marginally.

"We ought to get you home now," Hannibal whispered, and the soft exhalations were felt as well as heard as they breathed each other's air.

And before Will could press closer, fist his hands in the serial killer's jacket, Hannibal had moved away entirely, dropping his hands to pet along Will's shoulders only briefly. His head was tilted and his lips were quirked with the tell-tale signs of a pleased smirk, and Will forced himself to calm down as he irrationally grew angry. He swallowed the words of protest that

wanted out, pushing them aside as he felt himself instead swell to nearly breaking with respect and fondness for this man, who hadn't gone any further than a brushing of their lips because he had realized -correctly- that Will was not ready. His body, yes, but perhaps Hannibal felt that it was too soon as well.

"Come, then," was spoken softly into the air, before the man walked around the counter, and Will got to his feet, limbs feeling like jello, and followed him.

When they pulled up in front of Will's home in the Bentley, they were both comfortably heated by the car, and in true style, Hannibal bade him to remain seated while he got out to open the door for him. Will took the proffered hand, got out and bowed his head slightly in thanks, and then felt his body grow cold with their impending separation. Uncertainties spilled into him as he wondered what would happen next, what-ifs danced into his brain, and it was as if a curtain had opened on him and interrupted the play mid-act. The bubble he found himself in when he was around Hannibal, alone with him or standing over a soon-to-be-corpse, was popped. Reality was a bitch that Will wanted to slap into the next dimension, but he remained silent.

"Goodnight, dear Will," Hannibal said quietly, voice close and comfortable.

"Goodnight, Hannibal," Will whispered in response.

Will Graham watched the Bentley drive away with his heart in it, held in the long-fingered hands of one Hannibal Lecter. He hadn't voiced his insecurities, didn't need to. He realized with no uncertainty that the man would come to him again.

He walked into his house with a smile he felt in his entire body.

❀

The article wasn't exactly WOMAN FOUND dead, but it was similar, and it wasn't in the newspaper at all this time. Those that found the TattleCrime article shivered as it was revealed that Missy Sterling was found with her head embraced against her own body, almost as if she were cradling a child there.

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